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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined effective approaches to the professional development of teachers are presented in this paper. Methodology involved a survey of principals in New South Wales, Australia, and the United States; an evaluation of 379 inschool staff development programs in New South Wales; case study analysis of 8 New South Wales schools with exemplary staff development programs; a longitudinal study of a New South Wales primary school; and case study analysis of 5 successful individuals in New South Wales and the United States. Findings indicate that the cultural factors crucial to professional development included the principal's role, school culture, and models of teacher change. A holistic, individualized approach to staff development requires understanding the dynamics of interpersonal interaction. Components of effective teacher development programs include written plans, effective leadership, staff involvement, and positive support systems. (LMI)

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Holistic Individualized Approaches to Staff Development in Schools

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Staff Development in Schools:

A Holistic, Individualized Approach

This study utilized the data from five different sources in examining effective approaches to the professional development of teachers. The methodology for the study was primarily qualitative, although one of the sources was a survey collated utilizing descriptive statistics.

The following questions emerged from the literature and the initial research:

1. What do teachers perceive as the purposes and effects of supervision?

2. What staff development practices were perceived as being successful and effective?

3. Which staff development practices were perceived to support the most effective learning conditions for teachers?

4. What are the key elements or events which mark the careers of successful people?

5. How do teachers best learn about teaching?

Early models of teacher development such as clinical supervision were dominated by efforts to correct perceived deficits. Hord et al (1987) developed the Concerns Based Adoption model, Fullan (1987), the Innovations Focussed model, and the Action Research model was refined in Joyce and Showers (1982) concept of "coaching" and Cambourne's (1991) Frameworks program. From the literature and the early stages of research, three areas emerged as being particularly significant in nurturing effective teacher growth: leadership, culture, and teacher change.

It became clear that the three identified areas should be considered holistically. The setting of the school is a dynamic unit in which leadership, culture, and teacher change affect and are affected by each other. The questions were addressed by responses from the following sources:

1. An open-ended survey of principals and teachers in New South Wales, Australia and in the U.S.A. to ascertain links between supervision and staff development.

2. An evaluation of in-school staff development in New South Wales, Australia.

3. Case studies of exemplar schools in staff development in New South Wales, Australia.

4. A longitudinal study of a primary (elementary) school in New South Wales, Australia.

5. Case studies of the careers of successful people in New South Wales, Australia and in the U.S.A. to determine key elements or events in their lives.

Theoretical Perspective

Commentaries on staff development in schools documented the haphazard and uncoordinated approaches often utilized in staff development. The literature on staff development can be categorized into three areas: (i) leadership, which included the role of the principal and empowerment of teachers; (ii) the culture of the school which emanated from the interaction of its members and particularly the relevance of peer interaction to the quality of the culture; and (iii) teacher change, which considered models of teacher change, staff development as reflection-in-action, the methodology

of teachers learning about teaching, and the effective schools movement. Each of the aspects of staff development was considered in the holistic context of the school setting.

Bateson (1979) and Capra (1978) described holism as "a new vision of reality based on an awareness of the essential interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomenon". The work of Smith (1982) and Cambourne (1988) related the nature of language learning to how children learn to be literate.

In this holistic context, the pertinence of leadership and particularly, the role of the principal, was considered through studies by Sweeney (1982), who revealed leadership behaviors of principals associated with schools which were well-managed, as did Blumberg's (1980) study. Smyth (1980), Sergiovanni and Starrat (1989) and Hunter (1986) commented on the principal's role in relating to teachers through supervision.

Effective leadership was characterized by the devolution of power revealed in commentaries by Leiberman in Brandt (1989) and Chrisco (1989). Leadership in effective schools was akin to that described by Peters and Waterman (1981) in successful businesses. Costa (1991) highlighted the need for principals to build trust and to challenge teachers. Good principals withheld judgment on teachers and viewed the teaching/learning process as a continual problem-solving creative method of inquiry. Devolution of power usually meant shared decision-making and the lessening of isolation which is characteristic of the culture of many schools.

Commentaries on the culture of schools recognized the importance of the culture in its own right and tended to recommend changes to the context itself to support desirable teacher change rather than

accommodation to practice which, incidentally changed context. Hargreaves (1988) observed that the work environment and teachers response to it more powerfully influenced teaching practice than individual teacher characteristics. Whilst studies in the 1980's focussed on the context of the school, the impact of social relationships and school cultures, the Action Research model and Innovation Focussed models focussed on the classroom (Rosenblum & Hovis, 1981, Joyce & Showers, 1982, Hord et al., 1987).

Sarason (1990) argued that the ideal learning conditions for teachers should mirror those desirable for the growth and development of children. Conditions for learning were identified by Cambourne (1988) following his observation of children learning language. These conditions were: immersion in the learning context, demonstration, expectation, responsibility, use, approximation, and response. All conditions interacted holistically when the learner engaged with the conditions.

Many factors influenced effective staff development and teacher change. The focus of the five sources of data sought to analyze significant factors influential in successful outcomes of developmental practice.

Findings from the Studies

The open-ended survey was designed to gain an insight into teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of supervision. The survey was distributed to teachers in selected schools in New South Wales, Australia and in the U.S.A..

Responses to the survey emphasized supervision and its relationship to staff development in terms of teacher growth and teacher change. Comments emphasized the importance of the interpersonal skills of listening,

communicating, fostering growth, purposing and empowering in effective leadership. The desirability of a focus on strengths, on two-way communication, fostering teacher esteem, and positive feedback was emphasized. Organizational factors in supervisory programs were seen to be less important than the emotional and affective aspects of interpersonal interaction. Experiential learning and growth in challenging situations were significant turning points in teachers' careers.

Feedback from the open survey provided guidance for the direction of other studies.

The Evaluation of In-School Staff Development in New South Wales Schools, 1990, was commissioned to examine the current status of staff development through a program evaluation. A valid stratified sample of 379 schools was surveyed and the results tabulated utilizing descriptive statistics. Space was also available for open-ended comments.

Feedback from the survey indicated that programs and practices which afforded a wide range of experiences were valuable in staff development. Staff development plans and programs were most effective where there was thorough and open negotiation amongst the parties involved and the writing was in plain concise language. Such plans were seen to be an important framework for nurturing the culture of the school.

Meetings of various kinds were reported to be the most common process for negotiation and clarification of meaning. The most effective meetings were small group meeting structured so that they were meaningful with clear agendas in which the stakeholders had an involvement. Feedback from such meetings was clearly communicated to all interest groups.

Organizational skills such as structuring meeting networks and time management and manipulation were important skills in allowing the breaking down of isolation and provided the framework for staff development. Teacher change was perceived as effective where teachers were involved in meaningful exchanges. Enforced supervision provoked negative reactions.

Most teachers in supervisory positions indicated that they had had very little support in developing supervisory skills. "Trial and error" was seen to be the most prominent method of gaining such skills.

Case studies were conducted in eight schools identified as exemplars in having particularly effective staff development programs. The case studies were conducted in a variety of schools in terms of size, type, location, and population mix in New South Wales, Australia. The case studies evoked several strong themes. Effective leadership was important in each situation. The role of the principal and that of others who demonstrated leadership in schools was often idiosyncratic, yet in each case, interpersonal factors were particularly critical in producing the strong culture evident in each of the schools studied. Teachers were aware of the strength of the culture and also aware of the standing of the school in the community. There were strong internal networks of peer support and each of the schools involved their communities in meaningful ways. Care for individuals and a striving for the common good were values strongly evident.

The Longitudinal Study of Sylvania Primary School, a New South Wales primary (elementary) school, took place throughout 1988 and 1989. The ethnographic data was collected through interviews, observations, journaling, responses from meetings of various kinds, and analysis of pertinent artifacts. The study was designed to pilot methods which

stimulated interaction among members of staff incorporating meaningful supervision and peer interaction. Debriefing was an important aspect of the exchanges.

Deliberate efforts were made to dissipate the hierarchical elements associated with supervisory practices to empower teachers and to eliminate the expert/novice posture often involved with supervision and consultancy, recognizing the expertise of the teacher.

Over the period of the project, the teachers indicated clearly changing attitudes and developing philosophies. The conditions of language learning (immersion, demonstration, approximation, use, response, responsibility, expectation, and engagement) were evident, both in the teaching/learning process between teachers and children, and in the staff development process among teachers and those in supervisory positions. The development of documentation by a continual process of dialogue, feedback and incremental change particularly illustrated this. Reflective processes and concern for the self-esteem of all were very evident.

Five people in New South Wales, Australia and in the U.S.A., each at different stages of their careers and occupying different career positions, were selected because they had been deemed to have been successful teachers. These people were interviewed in the Case Studies of Career Turning Points to determine the elements of their success. The data collection was gathered in audio-taped interviews.

Although each of those interviewed related to people in their own individual ways, their expectations of themselves were important, as was the impact of significant others and varied experiences in their lives and career paths. Interpersonal skills, caring and compassion, dedication and commitment permeated the responses. The development and adherence to

character strengths such as empathy and honesty were important to each individual. Each exhibited high order communication skills and all had been exposed to a wide variety of experience, roles, and responsibilities. Time to reflect during their careers often triggered new directions in their thinking.

Conclusions

Q1. Many factors influenced the culture crucial to the development of individuals in the dynamic holistic environment in which they interact. Of particular influence was the role of the principal and the impact of leadership, the nature of supervision, the culture of the school, and the models and influences (particularly of peers) which brought about teacher change.

Q2. A holistic, individualized approach to staff development requires understandings about the dynamics of interpersonal interaction, role modelling, bonding with significant others, and the power of meaningful, collaborative decision-making. Such an approach entails the nurturing of the sense of "calling" which typifies good teachers. Teacher development implies refinement not only in curriculum, methodology, and classroom management, but also in the development of character strengths, beginning with caring, empathy, and honesty. Such a program is best cultivated in optimum learning conditions that should exist for students and teachers alike. These conditions may be found in the model for learning drawn from research on how children learn language: immersion, demonstration, approximation, responsibility, response, usage, expectation, and engagement (Cambourne, 1988).

Q3. Staff development appeared to be most effective where written

plans existed and systematic attempts were made to involve all staff. Staff development occurred best in conditions which enabled engagement of teachers, where they were allowed to incrementally build new knowledge on their current knowledge base. Experiential learning and varied roles and responsibilities were necessary factors repeatedly evident in the careers of successful people.

Q4. Effective leadership was essential to effective staff development. Teacher empowerment was an important aspect of leadership. Effective communication networks were overtly cultivated and utilized both formally and informally. The conditions in which teachers best learn were cultivated in schools with strong developmental cultures.

People who achieved success were usually exposed to a variety of experiences, roles, and responsibilities. They developed confidence through positive feedback and exhibited a passion for excellence.

Their communication skills were of the highest order, and they exhibited compassion for, and a belief in, others. Time to reflect often triggered changes in career direction. Their attitudes and abilities were affected by their engagement with the task of teaching and the impact of significant people in their lives.

Q5. Teachers learned best in conditions which were cultivated in positive support systems. Teacher empowerment and peer support were important. Leadership played a critical role in supporting such cultures.

Meetings of various kinds should allow for the involvement of all staff members and the ensuing ownership of decisions. Small meaningful meetings which involved personnel in planning and which gave appropriate feedback were particularly pertinent. Optimum learning conditions for

teachers were sponsored in an atmosphere of sharing and concern for the common good.

Staff development was successfully cultivated where efforts were made to increase peer interaction, empower teachers by limiting expert/novice input, and by focussing developmental activities on teaching practice.

In effective staff development settings, the principals' role was visionary and supportive. The conditions in which teachers learned best aligned with those in which children best learn.

The focus of holistic education nurtured in ideal conditions should lie in developing more adaptable and more interpersonally mature people. Education should be a lifelong process, of which schooling should be an integral part for both teacher and student. The cultivation of character strengths such as caring, empathy, and honesty, should provide the thread which intertwines academic, social, physical, and cultural development.